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COMMON GROUND--RESPECT FOR ALL OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

I thank you for the opportunity to meet with you at your third annual Common Ground Country Fair. Secretary Bergland sends his greetings and best wishes to you all.

The idea of this fair is only three years old, yet some 20,000 persons are participating. Obviously you are responding to a popular concept--a concept which reflects the increased value many people are placing today on wise land use, on the family farm, on organic farming, on appropriate technology, and on self-sufficiency.

We think of these values as those held by the early settlers of this country. It is important to remember, however, that the reasons our ancestors held them were quite different from our's. Let me illustrate the point with a true story.

Shortly after the Civil War, several families from a small Swedish community left their farms and homes to come to America. A representative from Maine had exhorted them with visions of unlimited lands with rich soils, productive forests, and sparkling streams.

The "utopia" they had purchased turned out to be a vast expanse of blackened, burned-over land. Their homes were crude communal camps. While one mother was surveying the desolate scene, her two-year-old daughter died in her arms. A grandfather dropped dead from exhaustion. Before that terrible first winter was over, others died from cold, disease, and shortages of food.

Those who survived conquered that blackened land and turned the stubborn soil into farms. By sheer determination--sometimes mixed with bitterness--they established a new community.

Remarks by M. Rupert Cutler, Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, before the Common Ground Country Fair, Litchfield, Maine, September 22, 1979

They respected the land--their common ground. Over the years as opportunities grew in the cities, descendants of those early settlers left the land and Maine became a state with many abandoned farmsteads.

Now times have changed. Your fair and you here today represent a movement back to rural America. In that movement is a new respect for the land--the common ground of today.

Your common ground no longer springs from a sense of apprehensive awe, but one of wonder and reverence. You no longer fear the land. Your common ground recognizes the interdependence of people, the land, and the environment around them. It creates a dedication to live in harmony with the land and the forces and products of nature. Your common ground is founded on knowledge we now have that the early settlers did not possess.

Over the years our scientists have discovered an enormous amount of scientific principles about land, soils, water, plants, and agriculture. Some farmers have used that knowledge to exploit the land and ruin the soils. But that knowledge is available to you--who respect the land--to use also. Without that knowledge, you, too, would be faced with the same fearsome struggle that confronted early settlers.

Your common ground movement is also the beneficiary of the technology that has mushroomed over the past two centuries.

Some may regret this technology, be dismayed by machines that exploit our resources, and be repulsed by the tentacles of concrete and blacktop that smother productive land. Some may be strongly opposed to unregulated use of snow mobiles, trail bikes and dune buggies, and frightened by widespread use of chemicals. Some may be frustrated by the way technology has aided the ever-increasing size of farms.

These concerns are justified. But there are many technological advances in use to save our land, to protect our water supplies, and to improve the quality of rural life.

The technologies of soil management and conservation, the use of integrated pest management, scientific planning and management of our forests, the application of research findings to the protection of streams and water supplies, and modern practices of food preservation are essential to the conversion of your common ground from a concept into sustainable practice. Without these technologies we would still be struggling with the blackened lands of the past, trying to conquer nature rather than being able to live in harmony with it.

I do not make these comments about knowledge and technology to detract from the concerns or thrust of your movement. I make them to provide a perspective, a basis on which we in public office can work with you in obtaining our mutual goals.

Attitudes at the Department of Agriculture are changing toward movements such as yours. Secretary Bob Bergland would have been as much at home as I am at your country fair. He, too, would have been impressed with the new celebration of rural life: the combination of old-fashioned fun, demonstrations of old and new skills, games and contests, and educational booths.

The growth of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association from a few dedicated people to over 2,000 members illustrates the responsive chord you have struck with small and part-time farmers and gardeners and consumers. You are to be commended.

The interest you and we in government share go well beyond just watching your progress. The Department of Agriculture has taken several steps during the past three years to turn that interest into action.

Some of you may have attended the Regional Small Farm Conference in Poland Spring, Maine, last September. At the conference--and similar ones held around the country--farmer delegates identified and gave priority ratings to their major problems.

As a result of these conferences the Agriculture Department has attempted to improve our programs for small and limited-resources farm families by:

- o The Farmers Home Administration has increased credit.
- o The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service has earmarked \$1.3 million for special rural development and conservation projects.
- o The Soil Conservation Service is providing the technical service.
- o The Cooperative Extension Service is increasing the range of information available.
- o The Maine Forest Service and the Maine Rural Development Committee are cooperating with Department of Agriculture agencies to develop self-supporting forestry cooperatives for small woodlot owners.
- o Small farm family assistance projects have been started by the department, the Community Services Administration, and ACTION.
- o A pilot program is planned in three southern states in which low-income small farmers will be given training and an opportunity to buy their own land.
- o Congress has appropriated \$3 million to the department for small farm research on livestock, crops, and labor-reducing equipment.
- o The department has appointed a team of experts to study farms now using intensive organic methods, both in the United States and in foreign countries.
- o The department is increasing its efforts to develop integrated pest management, emphasizing biological, cultural, and genetic, rather than chemical approaches, to reduce environmental and human hazards in controlling pests.

o Secretary Bergland has announced a series of 10 public meetings in November and December to obtain comments and suggestions on economic and social issues affecting the structure of American agriculture and rural life. If the family farm is in trouble, he wants to know why--and what can be done about it. The meeting for your region will begin at Montpelier, Vermont, on November 27.

These commitments to the principles for which your movement stands are more widespread in Washington than just within the programs of the Department of Agriculture.

President Carter has pledged the most massive peacetime commitment of funds and resources in our nation's history for the development of alternative sources of energy fuels. To this, he has coupled a bold program for energy conservation. These programs deserve your study and your support.

Although agricultural production uses only 3 percent of the energy consumed in the United States, the country's existence is dependent on it.

There are tremendous opportunities for this country to develop substitutes for petroleum products in farming. These substitutes will emphasize solar energy, including the use of wind and water, which will not further deplete and degrade our natural resources.

We have an opportunity to develop the use of wood, crop and forest residues, and animal waste for the production of energy. Here in New England some industrial and community power plants already have converted from oil to wood waste. Nearly 50 percent of the households in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, are using wood as their primary heat source.

A recent report of the New England Energy Congress reveals that New England has the forest resource potential to obtain 25 percent of its energy requirements from wood or wood-related products by the end of the decade.

A recent conference at Syracuse University concluded that the use of wood for energy can yield many benefits if it is done by using recommended forestry practices. However, the conference noted that extensive clearcutting with no regard for sensitive environmental areas could seriously harm New England forests and the recreation, water, and wildlife they sustain.

We must be careful that we do not produce energy from our forests and crops at the expense of our land. Crop and forest residues must be left on the land, in some instances, to prevent soil erosion and avoid depleting the nutrients. Old "snags" often cut for fuelwood also are often the homes cavity-nesting birds.

The President's environmental message to Congress this year pledged sensitivity to energy needs and environmental considerations. I believe he was reflecting the prevailing attitude of most Americans.

Through energy conservation, agriculture can do much to meet its own needs as well as those of the nation.

Estimates indicate that conservation tillage on 70 percent of the tilled cropland would result in a net dollar saving each year of 47 million and a net energy saving of 135 million gallons of fuel. That's not to mention the value of soil conserved.

Use of integrated pest management can reduce the dependence on energy-consuming pesticides.

Increased use of organic wastes can lessen our need for commercially produced fertilizers.

These are some ways you and your government are, and can be, working together. If we do, we can develop a sustainable agriculture--a permanent agriculture--adapted to the requirements of maintaining the productivity of our soils, the clear, unpolluted flow of our streams, the richness of our magnificent rural America, and our own energy sources.

Once again I come back to your theme words: "Common Ground--Respect for the Land." It is a ringing slogan. It has meaning for us all. But I would push out the horizons of your common ground to include respect not only for our land, but also for our water, our sources of energy, our forests and range, our wetlands, and our fish and wildlife habitat. They're all part of the life-giving complex that surrounds us and on which our existence depends. Let's you and I, as representatives of the people and their government, make this day one of rededicating the purpose of common ground to the sustenance--of all our natural resources.

I wish your organization, your country fair, the very best of success this year and in the years ahead.

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